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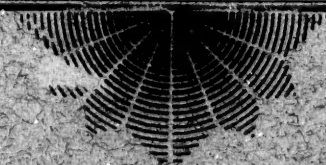


The CATACOMBS of Rome,

A LECTURE

BY

REV. C. A. CAMPBELL, PH.D., D. D.



1894.

Printed by J. P. POWER, 109 Harrington St.,
HALIFAX, N. S.



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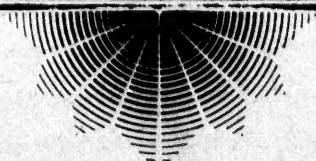


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ERRATA.

Page 9, line 1, for Mammouth read Mammoth.

" 13, line 25, "God has reserved himself for a crown," read, "it has reserved itself for a crown of the Lord."

Page 15, line 6, distruction read destruction.

" 17, " 9, ministrel, " minstrel,

" 18, " 3, custome, " custom,

" 19, " 9, guides, " guide,

" 21, " 12, Augustus' " Augustuses

" 31, " 12, Constantine, read Constantine

" 52, " 9, disguise " disguise.

" 64, " 17, know " knew



THE CATACOMBS OF ROME.



MR. CHAIRMAN, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN :

I invite you this evening to accompany me in your imaginations to scenes far removed, both in point of distance and in point of time, from those which surround us. Yet I trust the journey will not prove an unpleasant or unprofitable one, for the point to which I would lead you is Rome, and the scenes that I would bring before your minds form part of the real life of Christians who lived, suffered, and died, even as early as eighteen hundred years ago. And nobody, I am persuaded, who has paid any attention to the history of bygone nations, has dwelt ~~on~~ the history of Rome without a special interest. When, for the first time, our young minds were directed to the study of ancient history, one of the first things that settled themselves deeply into our memory, was the story of Romulus and Remus ; and, as our minds matured, we still turned to the history of Rome with interest ; not indeed from a childlike love of legendary story, but from the real importance attaching to that city, which from a few huts on the banks of the Tiber, sprang to be the mistress and metropolis of the world. We saw how the Roman nation

developed and expanded, drawing unto itself the neighbouring tribes, and extending its influence and its conquests to the peoples beyond the Mediterranean, along the shores of the Bosphrus, to the regions of the Rhine and the Seine, and even to the distant Britain ; till the known world became, in great part, subject to its sway, and Rome itself became the temple of the gods its subjugated peoples adored. But that city, rich with the spoils of a hundred conquered peoples, polished with all the refinement of pagan civilization, and unnerved by the luxury and vice accompanying the undisputed possession of wealth and power, we at length see her become the scene of a new religion and a new civilization. The teaching of the Crucified One of Nazareth are being preached in the stronghold of Paganism, and Rome recognizes within her walls a society that threatens to revolutionize the existing state of things. What followed we all well know ; and whoever has read of the struggle carried on in Rome between the pagan power and the Christian Church, has become acquainted with the name of the CATACOMBS. He has learned that that name is inseparably associated with the history of Christian heroism, and that all through the dark period which preceded the peace given to the Church under the first Christian Emperor, Constantine, the Catacombs were almost the only place wherein the Christians could meet to worship God in common. Still, comparatively few people

have ever had an opportunity of forming a clear idea what the Catacombs have been, and now are, or what has been their precise relation to the Christian Church. I shall this evening endeavour to treat of the Catacombs in such a way as to answer the principal questions that people would naturally ask concerning them. Owing to the fact, however, that the Catacombs are associated with the religious life of the early Christians, it is impossible to acquaint you of them, without, at the same time, speaking of some of these monuments still abounding therein, in which the religious belief of the early Christians is more or less clearly revealed. In order, therefore, to keep, as far as the nature of my subject will permit, on neutral grounds, I shall make it a point to narrate facts, and paint scenes rather than analyze or interpret them.

The Catacombs lie outside the walls, and encircle the whole city. They are contained within the limits of a more or less determined zone which at no point is more than two miles beyond the present walls, known as the walls of Marcus Aurelius. While they almost form a circle around the city, they are not, however, equally distributed on all sides. They are situated on the old Roman roads, and, as a rule, are more numerous on those sides of the city from which the greater number of roads branch out. Chief amongst these old roads are: the Flaminian Way, which now starts from the *Porta del popolo*, but at

first started from the *Porta Rutamena*, a little below the capitol, and terminates at Rimini, on the Adriatic coast; the Salarian Way, by which communication was kept up between Rome and the Sabines; the Nomentan Way, which leaves the *Porta Pia* and runs out to Mentana and Monte Rotondo, where in olden times it joined with the Salarian Way; the Tiburtine Way, which leaves the present *Porta San Lorenzo* and extends to Tivoli, the ancient Tibur; the well-known Appian Way, which connected Rome with Brindisium, or the modern Brindisi, the great port of Rome's commerce with the East; and the Ostian way, which connected Rome with her port at the mouth of the Tiber.

The Catacombs known in the region I have indicated are about forty in number, and are of two classes. The class which interests us most, as regards both number and monumental importance, comprises those which, though private in the beginning, expanded in the course of time, passed over to the administration of the Church, and finally became public burial places. To the second class belong those which always retained their private character, and may therefore be called family cemeteries. Of these forty Catacombs about thirty give sufficient evidence of having been public, while the remaining ten, or thereabouts, never passed out of the hands of the first, or private owners.

I have said that about forty Catacombs encircle the

city of Rome, and are situated on the old Roman roads ; and I hesitate not to conclude that some, perhaps many, of my hearers have already imagined themselves strolling on the suburbs of Rome, about a mile beyond its old walls, and turning from side to side as they pass, to gaze upon the hillocks formed of the clay thrown up long centuries ago from the Catacombs, and to peer occasionally into a deep cavity haunted by the memories of a thousand dead. But no ; our fancy frequently deludes us, until it has been repeatedly called to order by the stern voice of the real. Nothing is more common with young enthusiasts than to hurl all the wonders of antiquity into one scene, over which they may muse. After having read of Rome's antiquities, they imagine that if they visited Rome, they could sit on the ruins of the Capitol, and take in at a glance everything of interest that ancient and mediæval times have transmitted to us—the Palace of the Cæsars, the Baths, the Aqueducts, the Prisons, the Forum, the Colosseum, the Catacombs, St. Peter's, and a long line of other wonders. But this, you will easily understand, is, in great measure, a delusion. These monuments are scattered over a large surface, with quarters of the city, and the bustle of city life intervening, and in some cases, with the encroachments of modern life changing whatever of them was once visible. In many cases, therefore you must submit to the services of a guide ; and especially is this true with regard to the

Catacombs. You may walk around the suburbs and enjoy yourself with other sights ; you may see patches of Indian corn, of turnip and cabbage ; you may see small vineyards with bowers attached, wherein a rough bench and an equally rough table supply the comforts of the passer-by who desires to quench his thirst with a half-measure of wine ; you may ascend low hills, and cross over narrow intervening valleys, where herds of large, mouse-coloured cattle feed upon the luxuriant natural grass, before July's sun has seared it ; or you may stroll along the white, dusty roads, and find amusement in watching the country people with their strange vehicles and fantastic costumes, as they bring their vegetables to market ; or the milkman, dressed in sheep-skin knickerbockers and apron, as he returns from the city with his herd of well-milked goats. You may see all this, but unless you have somebody to point them out, you will pass over the Catacombs repeatedly, without observing anything that will indicate their site.

They are situated under small hills, or, at least, elevated grounds. Evidently this site was chosen as a precaution against the damage they might otherwise suffer from water accumulating within them. In some the entrance is from the surface, by a narrow stairway ; in others, however, it is from the side of the hill. Having entered, you will probably be surprised how narrow and low your surroundings are. You had pictured to yourself something more spacious—

something after the manner of the Mammoth cave—large halls where numerous congregations could easily find room ; and now you see the roof only two feet or so above your head, and without extending your arms to their full length you can touch the side walls simultaneously with your hands. No ; there are no very spacious apartments in the Catacombs. The open space within them is made up of galleries, or corridors, such as I have described, which open now and then into small *cubacula*, or chambers. These chambers vary in size as well as in design and finish. The absence of a well determined plan in the formation of the Catacombs is one of the first things that strike you. You can seldom proceed far in the same direction ; you have frequently to turn to the right or to the left, and occasionally you find yourself at the confluence of two or more galleries, or at the point of intersection of two that cut each other at right angles. An ascent or descent of two or three feet, over steps roughly cut out of the hard earth, has to be made from time to time ; and you seldom go far in any direction without reaching one of those chambers to which I have already made reference. The devious windings of the galleries, together with their frequent intersectings, render it unsafe, especially in the case of the larger Catacombs, to enter without a guide. The greater number have three stories, while some have as many as five, and even six. The lowest known point is eighty feet below the surface, and is

in the Catacombs of Callixtus, on the Appian Way. However, these stories are not situated in the same relation to one another as they are in a dwelling house. The nature of the soil would render such excavations impossible. The stories are connected one with another by stairways. It is thought by some archeologists that the narrow galleries and stairways did not enter into the original plan of the Catacombs, but that at first they consisted only of detached crypts of the saints and some cells, which, owing to the growing need of burial space, were finally extended and connected by the present galleries.

In these dark underground vaults and galleries, therefore, the early Christians found a burial place. On both sides as you pass along the narrow halls you see the graves cut tier above tier, out of the dry, porous *tufa granulare*, in which most of the Catacombs of the Roman Campagna are excavated. They are of all demensions from those of a full grown man down to those of an infant. Being cut out of the perpendicular wall, they open, as you may easily understand, from the side; and the marble slab that closes them, and bears the sepulchral inscription, stands on its edge, and faces over the tomb on a plane with the wall. This is the common form of tomb in the Catacombs, and is found, not only in the walls of the narrow galleries, but also in those chambers in which burial was permitted. The saints and martyrs were usually buried in the chambers, and the place

took the name of the most distinguished saint therein interred. In fact, the crypt of a saint soon became the centre of a little necropolis, and was the point from which the formation of the surrounding cemetery began. Burial beside the tombs, and in the crypts of the saints, was regarded as a great favor by the faithful, and though many sought it, few obtained it:—*Multi Cupiunt(t) et rari accipiunt(t)* as a certain grave-digger who, however, had obtained the honoured place, informs us in his own epitaph. Besides the kind of tomb that I have just described, there is another known as the *Arcosolium*, or arched tomb. A deep excavation in the form of an arch, is made in the wall, beginning about three feet from the base. The grave, or graves, are then dug out of the horizontal surface that forms the base of the arch, and the corpses, instead of being put in from a side opening, as is the case in the other species of tomb, are let down from above; so that you can lean in over them and look down upon the marble slab that covers them, or, if the slab be no longer in its place, on whatever relics of the dead that remain. The back and roof of the arch are generally covered with frescoes.

The great majority of the tombs, or whichever form they be, are now open, the slabs that closed them having fallen down, or been carried away, and you can see whatever the ravishes of time and men have left of the early Christians' mortal coil: which is seldom more than a little

dust and some pieces of bones. Many however, still remain as the hand of the grave-digger left them. Still, visitors generally manage to find some small aperture, where the mason-work has fallen away, through which to introduce a burning taper, by the light of which they can see the skeleton within. Naturally you find more of the human remains in the closed tombs. The skull bone and the larger bones of the body lie embedded in the brown clay, which has assumed an ashy appearance from its commingling with human dust. From the position of the disjointed members it can be seen that the corpse was laid supinely in the tomb, with the arms extended at full length by its sides, and that in the greater number of cases, it was covered, from head to foot, with a thin layer of lime. Next to the body was a light linen garment, over this was the layer of lime, and enclosing all, and keeping the lime in its place, was a second covering of heavier material. Not all, however, were buried in this way, for sufficient evidence is had that in some cases they were enclosed in noble and costly garments, the threads of gold with which they were interwoven being sometimes distinguishable. In the year 1845, there was discovered in the Catacombs of St. Lermes, on the old Salarian Way, the closed tomb of the Martyr St. Hyacinth, who was burnt to death, together with his brother Protus, in the persecution of the Emperor Valerian. On its being opened.

there were found within traces of ashes and burnt bones, intermingled with the remains of threads of gold belonging to the rich mantle in which the faithful had enveloped the precious relics they had snatched from the flames. The remains were removed to the Church of the Propaganda College, where they are preserved under a side altar. The rings of bronze or more precious metals, which they had worn in life, were not always removed from the hands of the dead, and are sometimes found hanging to the fingers of the skeleton.

It would carry me too far from the plan of my discourse to stop here to describe the funerals of the early Christians. I shall merely say, that psalms and hymns were sung over the corpse, and that, when the times permitted, it was accompanied to the tomb by the faithful carrying lighted candles and torches. When the tomb was closed flowers and green boughs and aromatic balsams were cast upon it. Flowers were a commonly employed symbol of the heavenly garden, or Paradise; and were placed on the tombs, or hung around the necks of the dead; but on account of an idolatrous rite then prevailing of placing a crown of flowers on the head of the corpse, the Christians refrained from it. "The brow," wrote St. Cyprian, "that is pure with the sign of God cannot wear the crown of the devil; God has reserved himself for a crown." Excessive lamenting for departed friends and

the use of black mourning garments, though not condemned as unlawful, were, nevertheless, regarded as not exactly in harmony with that spirit in which Christians should look upon death. Hence St. Cyprain again remarks, (de Immort) that “ *We should not weep for those who have been freed from the world by the call of God, since we know that they are not lost, but only sent before us* ” Accordingly, the faithful were forbidden to employ *præficæ*, or *incitatrices*, as they were called; that is, hired female mourners, who wept to order, and sang the praises of the dead in little songs called *neniæ*—a class of people, I am inclined to believe, strongly resembling the “ *keen* ” (Irish, *caoine*) singers of later days.

Now, to return to the Catacombs, from which we have departed by this short digression. Though, as a rule, people are not fond of keeping the memory of death and the grave fixed in their minds, nevertheless, visitors to the Catacombs, whether they be devout Christians, grave antiquarians, or empty-headed sight seers, would willingly carry away something from the tombs as a souvenir of their visit. But they are admonished not to touch anything. Certain of the Catacombs still have a church standing over them, to which is attached a monastery of some religious order of men, who attend to the church, and care for the Catacombs as well. In this case your guide is invariably a member of the order. Having provided, when necessary,

each of the visitors with a wax taper, which he lights from his own giant roll, and having conducted the party to the entrance, he turns around and addresses a few words of final admonition to all. You must keep together, follow him, and not interfere with the tombs, and it is their intention to preserve the Catacombs, and not to permit their destruction. Having spoken, he turns and enters, followed by the visitors, who advance in single file. Unless the party be very small, the brother guide is soon lost to the view of those in the rear. Where the gallery is straighter than usual, they occasionally catch sight of him, through the sickly glare of the burning tapers, as he turns around to make some short remarks on the topography or the history of the section they are about to enter, or to point out some tomb or other object deserving special notice. His words are carried back along the line of visitors, but are often seriously mutilated and interpolated before they reach the rearmost. When, from time to time, they enter the chambers, or the crypts of the saints, all are brought within reach of his voice : and they press closely around him, while he relates the history of the crypt and of its discovery, draws their attention to the faded frescoes on the walls, and enumerates the saints originally buried there. He furthermore points out whatever is peculiar in the formation of the chamber, such as shelf-like excavations in the wall, or rough seats hewn out of the hard earth ; or, perhaps, in the end wall, something after

the manner of a very deep, wide niche with a table-like base : and he will likely mention some of the more important inscriptions and other memories that were found here and are now in some public museum ; and how the discoveries made by archeologists tally with certain old documents relating to the Catacombs and the saints therein interred. Indeed, it is gratifying to learn how many facts recorded in the lives of the early martyrs have been corroborated by recent discoveries made in the Catacombs. We are aware that, with the lapse of time, many hearsays were inserted as facts in the Acts of the martyrs. But these cannot vitiate the whole work. Error presupposes truth ; exaggerations and wild, incoherent reports presuppose an event which, in some respect at least, excited more than common interest. The historical critic cannot reasonably reject an entire narrative because he knows part of it is exaggerated, or false. It is his duty to distinguish between true and false testimonies, and to determine, as far as his means will permit, what is certain and what is only probable. The Acts of the martyrs are not a collection of mere popular traditions. Pope Clement I. (91-101) appointed notaries who would register the names of those who should suffer in times of persecution, and the circumstances of their death. The successors of Clement adopted this same plan ; and have thus preserved to us the history of the highest type of heroism that has yet been recorded of men.

This class of guide differs widely from the vulgar *Cicerone* we sometimes see at the head of a band of sight-seeing strangers in Rome. He knows whereof he speaks; while the other speaks first of what he knows, and then of everything he is questioned about, whether he knows it or not. I never saw one of those *Ciceroni* gesticulating before an astonished audience of foreigners amid some historic ruins, without being reminded of the old minstrel, as described by Walter Scott, who, when he warmed up to the airs he had once known, but which were now fading from his memory, could compensate for the defects of his memory from the productiveness of his imagination :—

Each blank in faithless memory void
The poet's glowing thought supplied.

This finished, the guide again immerses into one of the dark galleries, and again you pass between graves lying tier above tier, some opened and some closed, with nothing, as a rule, to distinguish one from another, except the names and the symbolic figures accompanying them. Here and there, beside the tombs, you can see sockets where lights were set into the wall, to be kept burning day and night, on certain solemn occasions and you can see also little vases of glass or earthenware, which were used at the embalming of the dead, when it became a mere ceremony. I say, when it became a mere ceremony, for during the first two centuries

or so, all the Christian dead were embalmed with aromatic balsams. But, as their numbers increased it became more difficult to observe this custom, and finally it was reduced to the ceremony of throwing some sweet-smelling balsams on their tombs.

Onward the guide leads you, occasionally descending a few feet of stairway, and changing his direction so often that you completely lose your bearing, and are no longer certain of anything concerning the topography of the place, except, perhaps, that the law of gravitation still holds good, and that your feet are pointing to the centre of the earth. If you be of a thoughtful, or even of a nervous disposition, you are likely to reflect how completely you are at the mercy of the guide. If abandoned what could you do? You might call out all day, and your voice would never reach the over-ground. Twenty, thirty, perhaps sixty or seventy feet of cold earth shut you out from the light of heaven; and, even down where you are, your voice would reach but a short distance around the frequent corners and winding galleries. But more than that, you have no idea in what direction the entrance lies; and ever if you had, there are fifty chances against one that you would take the wrong way at some point, and in your bewilderment, would be unable to get back to the starting point. A feeling of awe overtakes you, and instinctively you press close to the guide. You recognize more clearly, perhaps, than ever before your

own littleness, and what a small force you are in the world. If the guide should desert you, or should fall dead of heart failure, there are fifty chances against one that you would leave your bones there. With such thoughts floating through their minds, the proudest and most cynical manifest a striking docility and simplicity of manner; and though, if once again on the surface, with the bright sun playing around them, they might show but scant respect for their guides, they now regard him with childlike reverence, as the one in whom, for the present, all their human hopes are centered. So powerful is fear to dissipate the mists of passion and prejudice which shut out from our view the good and noble in our fellow men, and permit us to contemplate only the gloom and shadows that the storms of human passions have cast over their lives! I may here mention that Antonio Bosio, the world-renowned archeologist of the 16th century, once lost his way, as he himself relates, in the Catacombs of Domitilla, on the Ardeatine Way; but the fear that seized him was very different in its character from that which we have just been considering. It was the fear of profaning such holy grounds with his unworthy bones.—But the procession advances, and the wonders that surround you are inspected one by one, till the low-burnt taper reminds you how long you must be there. However, the brother guide has been making the necessary calculations, and while you are still

perfectly ignorant of your whereabouts, you immerse into the light of day, and look about you in bewilderment.

Now, we have just taken a hurried survey of the Catacombs, without devoting much attention to any object in particular. But later on we shall return to some points of interest. Nevertheless, we have seen enough to convince us that the Catacombs are extensive and represent a vast amount of labour. Thus we have already learned enough about them to create difficulties for ourselves. How could such extensive works be carried on by a persecuted and ostracised society? Is it possible that, in making such excavations and meeting within them, they could evade the vigilance of their blood-thirsty persecutors? In order to answer this difficulty, the first thing to be taken into account is, that the primary and principal object of christians in forming the catacombs, was to prepare a burial place for their dead. The Catacombs were, in the strict sense of the word, cemeteries. At first they were sometimes called by different names, but their most common name was 'cemetery,' or the Latin 'cœmeterium,' which comes from the Greek word '*choimæterion*,' meaning a place where one sleeps, a dormitory, the dead being called by the Fathers '*dormientes*' or 'ones sleeping. It was not until a much later date that these cemeteries were given the name of Catacombs. About the end of the second century the designation Catacombs, or, in the Latin

parlance, 'Catacumbas,' was given to a certain part of the Appian Way, about two miles beyond the present walls. Etymologically considered, it means *beside the sepulchres*. In the course of time it became the distinctive name of one of the group of cemeteries in that vicinity, namely, the Cemetery of St. Sebastian Martyr; and later on in the middle ages, the term became general, and was applied to all Christian underground burial places.

Now, the Christians had no existence recognized by law,—“*Non licet esse Christianos.*” They were esteemed only as material for arena amusements,—“*christiani ad leones.*” Still, at the time of the first Flavian Augustus²⁵ they had there spacious cemeteries which, within, were ornamented with the art of the period, and, without, had large, conspicuous openings on the public roads. The explanation of this fact, which, to many people, will doubtless seem strange, lies in the reverence of the Roman law for the graves of the dead. With a strange inconsistency that same law which proscribed the Christian religion, and persecuted it in its every member, from the Supreme Pontiff down to the humblest slave, recognized as holy the sod under which a human corpse, whether of a Christian or of a pagan, rested. Human life was of very little value amongst the Romans. The poor, the slaves, and the gladiator* might be made the victims of famished lions and tigers; the victor might celebrate his triumph by

giving over to the populace thousands of his fellow beings to be put to death. But the moment the earth received their corpse the spot assumed a religious character, which was the warranty of its protection. In the language of the law the cemeteries were called *loca religiosa*, that is, religious grounds. According to the law also the bodies of those who suffered capital punishment were to be given to whosoever asked for them. (It was on the strength of this law that Joseph of Arimathea approached Pilate and claimed the body of our Divine Saviour.) But many were the exceptions made in the case of Christians. These desired to have the mortal remains of their martyred brethren in their possession, not only that they might give them proper Christian burial, but also an account of their profound religious reverence for them. Well knowing the veneration in which the Christians held such relics, and the courage against persecution which the possession of them inspired, the pagans used every art a diabolical malice could suggest, in order that they might not pass into Christian hands ; sometimes casting them into the sea, and consigning them to dogs and wild beasts to be devoured ; and, on some occasions, mingling them with those of cattle, so as to render recognition impossible. But a deeper-rooted hatred than that which is satisfied with inflicting bodily punishment prompted the pagans to these acts ; for it was a common opinion amongst them, that if the body was

deprived of burial, the soul perished with it ; and then there could be no triumph after death.

Still, the Christians persevered in claiming the bodies of their dead, and ran no small risks to reclaim them from the indignities cast upon them by pagan hatred. They gathered up reverently the mangled remains of their brethern, and bore them away, if not with pomp, at least with true Christian love, to the place prepared for them within the Catacombs. The more distinguished saints and martyrs were given special honors as regards the size and magnificence of their tombs ; and, as I have already said, some of them gave their name, not only to the crypt wherein they were buried, but also to the little necropolis that sprang up around it. We must bear in mind that the Catacombs were the common burial places of the Christians : not only the saints and martyrs were laid in their silent vaults, but all other as well, whatever their social condition or degree, so long as their sepulchral slab could receive the words *in pace*, by which it was signified that they died in peace, that is, in communion with the Church. Venerating as they did, these unwavering champions of the faith, whose example had encouraged them in so many trials, the faithful Christians desired that in death they might find a resting-place beside them. They endeavoured, therefore, to procure for themselves a burial place as near to them as possible, and in their zeal they sometimes overstepped the

limits of prudence, and did damage to the tombs. In a well-known inscription in the Catacombs of Callixtus, Pope Damasus I. very mildly checked this course of action, saying that he himself wished to be buried there, where so many of his saintly predecessors rested, but that he feared to disturb their holy ashes :

*Hic fateor Damasus volui mea condere membra,
Sed cineres timui sanctos vexare piorum*

But it was reserved to an archdeacon named Sabinus, of the Church of St. Lawrence, on the Tiburtine Way, to give this imprudent class of the faithful a good, strong lecturing. This he did in a metrical epitaph placed on his own tomb. He reminds them that it will be no advantage, but will rather be a disadvantage to them, to be near the graves of the saints, unless they be near to them also in the holiness of their lives. It is not with the body, he adds, that we pass onward to the saints, but with the soul, which, being once saved, can well be the salvation of the body.

However fiercely the storm of persecution raged without, within the precincts of the cemeteries, which the law recognized as inviolable, a haven was opened to the endangered Christian. It was as unnecessary as it was impossible to keep the pagans in ignorance of the existence, or the whereabouts of the Catacombs. Accordingly, a gateway opened from them into the public road ; and little

overground dwellings of the grave-diggers and other labourers, as well as small oratories, in honor of distinguished saints buried beneath, were situated within the cemetery grounds.

The limits and dimensions of these grounds were indicated, if not always, at least in many instances, on stone blocks, set up on the road-side and bearing inscriptions telling how many feet of frontage (*in fronte*) belonged to the cemetery, and how far back from the road (*in agro*) it extended. The *fossors*, who sometimes had their little houses within these limits, filled an office which, among the early Christians, commanded distinguished respect; whereas the *vespillones*, who were engaged in similar work among the pagans, were held in contempt by their own brethern; and whoever desired to insult a pagan needed only call him a *vespillo*. The *fossors* looked after the cemeteries, dug the graves, and prepared the dead for burial, and in recognition of the noble character of their work, and in proof of the honour in which they were held, they enjoyed, among other things, the privilege of securing a tomb for themselves near the tombs of the saints. A certain *fossor*, who had obtained the desired place, joyfully informs us in his own epitaph, that he had been granted what many desire and few obtain: *Quod multi capiunt (t) et rari accipiunt (t)*.

Availing themselves of this comparative immunity

enjoyed be the cemeteries, the Christians met within their silent chambers for other purposes than that of burying the dead. Freedom of public worship was denied them, except during the intervals between general or partial persecutions. They therefore sought within the Catacombs, beside the sepulchres of the martyrs, a refuge where they might meet to worship God in common. At the beginning, however, before the Catacombs passed over from the private owners of the grounds to the administration of the Church, that is to say, up till near the end of the second century, the meetings were comparatively small. But, as the numbers of the faithful increased, and the Catacombs grew in dimensions, larger numbers congregated within them. Still, the pagans would think it only natural that the Christians would visit the graves of their dead. It was only when suspicions arose that the Catacombs were being used for places of worship, that the rights extended to them by law began to be violated. Indeed, the Christians continued to congregate there for a long time without exciting any special comment ; for just about the time the Catacombs lost their private character and began to be used as places of public worship, societies were forming amongst the pagans, whose object it was to procure a burial place and the desired funeral services for their members. But, if such societies existed amongst the pagans, might they not as well exist amongst the Christians, and might not the cemeteries be

selected as a suitable place for their meetings? Hence, at that critical period, when the safety of the Christians must otherwise have been greatly endangered, this fortunate circumstance warded off suspicion from their gatherings, and, at least for a time, baffled the vigilance of the pagan Romans. But the state of affairs that afforded a certain security to the Christians congregated in the Catacombs, was not destined to continue long. These meetings at length began to be regarded with suspicion; the populace clamored against them, until an edict of the Emperor Valerian, in the year 257, prohibited further reunions within the cemeteries; consequently, the Catacombs began to be violated, sometimes by officers of the law, sometimes by the infuriated populace, and Christian blood began to purple their alleys and crypts, as it had long before purpled the arena of the Flavian Amphitheatre. Spies were engaged to watch the movements of the Christians, and to give notice when they assembled. The Christians, though they frequently succeeded in evading the vigilance of the pagans, were, nevertheless, sometimes overtaken and massacred. One of the most memorable events of this nature, of which we have any record, is the execution of Pope Sixtus II., who was surprised while surrounded by a number of his clergy in the Catacombs of Callixtus, and beheaded in his pontifical chair.

A few words on the administration of the cemeteries

will here be in order. Towards the end of the second century, they passed, as I have already said, into the hands of the Church, and henceforward remained under her administration. In the year 197 Pope Scephrinus placed the deacon Callixtus (afterwards Pope Callixtus I.) over the large cemetery on the Appian Way, which still retains his name—Callixtus, and which, after the abandonment of the Vatican cemetery, became the official burial-place of the Bishops of Rome. Within a short time deacons were appointed to oversee the other public cemeteries also. Pope Fabianus (236-251) did much towards having a fixed system of administration established; and Pope Dionysius (258-270), on whom devolved the work of reconstruction after the revocation of the edict of Valerian, placed the cemeteries under the jurisdiction of the titular, or parish priests, of whom there were then about twenty-five in the city of Rome. Each cemetery, therefore, was subject to the spiritual jurisdiction of a titular, or parish priest of the city, and served as the parish burial place. There was one exception—the cemetery of Callixtus, which always remained under the immediate jurisdiction of the Popes. Pope Marcellus, (304-309) during whose pontificate the cemeteries were confiscated by Maximian and Dioclesian and soon after restored, found it necessary to undertake the work of reorganization. He established (as we read in the *Liber Pontificalis*) twenty-

five *titles* in the City of Rome on account of the baptism and penance of many who were being converted from paganism, and for the burial of the martyrs: *XXV. titulos in urbe Romana constituit quasi dioceses, propter baptismum et poenitentiam multorum, qui convertebantur ex paganis et propter sepulturas martyrum.*

The escape from the Catacombs and the entrance to them in case of persual by the enemy, was sometimes more expeditious by way of the *arenaria*, or sandpits, which were attached, if not to all, at least to the larger ones. The entrance by them was freer, and the pits themselves were much wider than the galleries of the Catacombs. Some people have thought, and perhaps many of you have heard it said, that the Catacombs were at first nothing more than sandpits, from which building material had been brought to Rome, and that they were subsequently occupied by the Christians as hiding places and burial grounds. This opinion was likely set afloat by those who could not explain how the Christians could excavate and possess such extensive cemeteries in times of persecution, and who, perhaps, had never sufficiently studied the points of difference between a sandpit and a Catacomb. But the difficulty that kept such persons from arriving at the truth vanishes, when we remember the immunity enjoyed by the cemeteries on account of their religious character. Nor does the fact that sandpits are found in connection with some Catacombs,

offer any difficulty ; for the mason-work that had to be done in the Catacombs themselves rendered a goodly amount of sand necessary.

You will now understand how we are to interpret forms of expression used at times by ecclesiastical writers, when, for instance, they speak of the Church 'living in the Catacombs,' while the persecutions lasted, and 'rising out of the Catacombs,' when the persecutions ended. We must not understand them as meaning that the faithful inhabited the Catacombs. They visited them as we visit our cemeteries, they met there to worship God in common, they found a hiding place there when sought after by the enemy, and a temporary protection when closely pursued. Such was the use of the Catacombs.

Whatever protection the Christians found in the Catacombs after the pagans became aware of the use to which they were being put, was due, not altogether to the fear the pagans entertained of being lost if they should enter, but in part also to the reverence with which, even then, they regarded the graves of the dead. The fear of being forever imprisoned in dark underground apartments, the extent and devious windings of which they knew not, did much to cool the ardour of their religious hatred, and to arrest their steps at the entrance ; but the reflection that they were seeking the blood of their fellow-men in the regions of the dead, within grounds that the law called

“holy,” had its influence also. You will easily perceive, however, that the lot of the faithful during this period, must have been a hard one. The doubtful refuge which the Catacombs occasionally offered some hunted Christian, did very little to light up the general gloom of persecution that hung over the Christians of the Empire. But that last and terrible effort of pagan Rome to destroy Christianity within her dominions was made ; Diocletian passed away, and after a few years a brighter day dawned on the faithful people.

‘*In hoc signo vinces,*’ ‘in this sign thou shalt conquer,’ were the prophetic words that emblazoned the cross which appeared to Constantine, and his embattled hosts. In this sign he conquered, and in this sign, he soon learned to believe mankind shall eventually triumph. In this sign a young and proscribed community, without armies or gold, had sustained for almost three centuries the shock of his imperial predecessors ; waxed strong beneath the goad of the persecutor ; made joyful victims to its precepts, not only among the poor and lowly, but even in the Imperial Court itself, and had become awful to the power that had presumed to despise it. With the conversion of Constantine a great change took place in the relations between the Church and the civil power. He was not, it is true, altogether free from the spirit of Cæsarism ; yet he knew that civil rulers and magistrates are not the

divinely-appointed guardians of the Gospel truth, and that they cannot be legislators for a society superior to themselves. He therefore proclaimed the Church free in the exercise of its sacred and inviolable rights, and assisted and defended it in its labour for the sanctification of souls. In this new state of things the Catacombs were not forgotten. They were too closely associated with the history of suffering to be forgotten in the hour of triumph. New and more commodious entrances were made to them; churches, to the construction of which Constantine freely contributed, were erected over the tombs of the saints, without their bodies being removed from their original resting place. A certain religious reverence for the dead withheld the early Christians from interfering with their graves. And this circumstance accounts for the fact that various of the Churches built over the cemeteries in that period, have their floor below the surface of the soil. The high altar was to be immediately over the tomb of the saint to whom the church was dedicated, and the remains of the saint should be left untouched. Consequently, the body of the Church was lowered to the level of the tomb. For a striking instance of this custom, visitors to Rome can see the church of the Virgin Martyr St. Agnes, on the Nomentan Way.

The richness and beauty of the Churches constructed over the Catacombs, in this new period of their history, were the administration of the pilgrims who, in succeeding cen-

turies, came to Rome from all parts of the Christian world. The age of Damasus, who was Bishop of Rome from 367 till 385, was the golden age of the Catacombs. Damasus was a poet of no inferior order, and besides his other works for the embellishment of the cemeteries, he called into action his fine poetic talent, to celebrate in verse the memory and the merits of the Christian heroes of darker days. Marble slabs bearing his inscriptions are found throughout the Catacombs; and apart from the spirit of true Christian humility and of admiration for all that is noble, which pervades them and immediately gains for the author the affection of every true archeologist, they are most important from an historical standpoint, as they give in brief the history of the times in which the persons for whom they were written lived, and sometimes throw light, when very little is had from other sources, on difficult points of Church history. In fact, nobody need expect to be recognized as a full-fledged archeologist who cannot write from memory the sepulchral inscriptions of Damasus.

When the fetters of religious persecution were broken off the limbs of the Christians, and they were permitted to add external splendour to their private devotions, what a period of joy it must have been for them! Who can form an adequate idea of the spectacle the Catacombs must have presented in those days, especially on the feasts of the saints therein interred? Vent was given by public act to their feelings of

thanksgiving to God, and of love for their departed brethern of less favoured days. The faithful wended their way thither from all parts of the Christian world, but especially from Rome and its neighbourhood, to venerate in public their brethern and relatives, whose martyrdom they had, perhaps, witnessed, but whose memory they had hitherto been unable to honour, except in silence and tears. Led on by the example of their devoted leader, these fervent children of the Church raised a universal hymn of thanksgiving to God, and of praise of their departed brethern of darker days, who had sown and nourished with their blood the seed of faith, which they now saw grown to a mighty tree, that spread high and wide its virgin branches, bidding fair to obscure, with its richly-budding foliage, the unstable growth that had threatened to suffocate it. The freshest flowers adorned the tombs, the sweetest incense imparted its fragrance to the humid air, and the melodious chant of the most fervent-hearted worshippers resounded through the dark recesses of the Catacombs. By the uncertain light of the lamps and candles that burned before the tombs on such occasions, the devoted Christian could read—not the story of some mythical hero, not the pompous eulogy of some semi-deified pagan, but the simple epitaphs of martyred saints whose blood still marked the clay where they rested. Tender sisters came to breathe a prayer beside the remains of their loved brothers, who had preferred to suffer the lingering torments of the

tyrant rather than prove false to faith and virtue ; children came to shed tears of filial affection on the tombs of their fond parents, of whom, perhaps, their only remembrance was the cruel scene of martyrdom ; and even tottering parents sought the spot where they had laid their martyred child, there to raise their aged voices in thanksgiving to God, who gives to the timidity of youth courage and strength to preserve, even at the cost of life, the priceless treasure of virginal innocence. What impressions such scenes must have made upon the christian youth, what feelings of love they must have elicited, what noble resolves they must have inspired ! Indeed, the Catacombs were one of the most fruitful schools of saints. In them the faithful learned, in a striking manner, the power of faith over all the pains the world can inflict, and from them they went joyfully forth, ready to take up their cross and follow in the footsteps of their Divine master. St. Jerome tells us how his companions and himself used to spend the Sundays in visiting the Catacombs. "When, as a boy, he writes, I was engaged in the liberal studies in Rome, I used to go on Sundays, together with others of my own age and calling, through the sepulchres of the Apostles and martyrs, which are dug deep in the earth, on both sides as you enter, and in their walls have the bodies of those buried there."

Peace being given the Church, overground cemeteries be-

gan to be used, and underground burial gradually fell into disuse. We have no record of anybody being buried in the Catacombs after the year 410. Costly churches and oratories sprang up over them, and became centres of devotion to the faithful of Rome and the pilgrims from all parts of the Christian world. But darker days awaited the Catacombs. The barbarian legions who poured in upon Rome, and eventually effected the downfall of the empire, bid not spare the Christian cemeteries. In the fifth century these suffered the first spoliation at the hands of the Goths, especially those situated to the north of the city. Various popes labored to restore them. On the restoration of peace after the defeat of Totila, leader of the Ostrogoths, Pope John III gave them his immediate attention, and established a fund to defray the expenses of keeping them furnished with the necessities for the celebration of Mass within them on Sundays. *Instituit ut oblationes et amulae vel luminaria per eadem coemeteria omni die dominico de Lateranis ministrarentur.* Accordingly, a priest was sent on Sundays, from the city parishes, to each of the cemeteries, for the purpose of celebrating Mass—a custom which remained in vigour until the seventh century. But the insults offered to the tombs of the saints became so frequent, and the possibility of preserving the catacombs became so slight, that it was thought better, to remove the remains of the saints to churches within the city.

Consequently, about the middle of the 8th century, they began to be removed, notwithstanding the reluctance with which the early christians interfered with the graves of the dead. (It was at this time the Pantheon, the best preserved of ancient Rome's monuments, became the receptacle of so many relics of saints) Towards the end of the 9th century the last were removed, and the Catacombs began to fall into oblivion. Remember that I now speak of the removal of the remains of the saints and martyrs only, or of as many as could be identified as such. You can readily conclude for yourselves that the multitude of the faithful remained untouched. In the course of succeeding centuries occasional visits were made thereto by pilgrims, some of whom have left us an account of the neglected condition in which they found them. In the case of those Catacombs which had a church over ground, the parts closely connected with the church were kept open and cared for long after the date of which I speak. But, in general, they were forgotten. The hand of time gradually destroyed the works of man within them. The mason-work crumbled away, and sepulchral slabs, which at the time of their abandonment were still in place, fell and were broken; the rain entered unchecked through the sky-lights, and beat upon the walls of the crypts, blurring the frescoes, and loosing the ceilings, which fell and buried up the fragments of precious inscriptions that lay upon

the floor. After this interval of forgetfulness a period of revival succeeded. The earliest record we have of anybody visiting the Catacombs in this new epoch of their history is the name of a certain *Joannes Lonck*, written in a chamber of the Catacombs of Callixtus, with the date 1432. From this time forward the traces of visits thither become more frequent. One of them is deserving of a passing remark, as it shows from what distant parts of the world people were led to the Catacombs at a time when so comparatively little was known about them. Who would suspect that the sons of the heather would wander so far? Nevertheless, in the same chamber in which, thirty-five years earlier, Lonck had left his name, we find the record of a visit made by a party of Scotchmen. It is written in Latin, and says: "1467, certain Scotchmen were here" (*MCCCCLXVII Quidam Scoti Hic Fuerunt*). But the Columbus of the Catacombs at length appeared in the person of Antonio Bosio. Born about the year 1575, this pious and learned student of the Catacombs began his explorations at an early age, and in a posthumous work entitled *Roma Sotterranea*, or *Underground Rome*, has left us the fruits of his unwearying studies. There is scarcely a nook or corner of the Catacombs of Rome in which he has not left his name written. The publication of his work gave a fresh impetus to the study of Christian archeology, and his careful descriptions of the places he had visited and

the monuments he had discovered, served as a guide to those who, in succeeding centuries, undertook to explore those long-forgotten places.

Archeologists of great merit arose, from time to time, since the days of Bosio ; but our own generation has had privilege of knowing the greatest of them all. Fragmentary inscriptions, decaying manuscripts, fading frescoes, symbolical engravings, and varying forms of cemeterial excavations, had at other times been made to yield invaluable gifts to the store of Christian knowledge ; but never was it known how eloquently, and convincingly, they could be made to speak of the doctrine and practices of the early Christian Church, until they became vocal beneath the magic touch of the learning and genius of Giovanni Battista de Rossi. This wonderful man (for such I may term him) was born in Rome in February of 1822, and has passed from this life only a few months ago. A student of antiquities and inscriptions from his childhood, a master of all learning, whether Greek or Roman, sacred or profane ; a clear reasoner, an impartial judge, a sincere lover of truth, and a devout Christian, he spent 50 years of his life in searching the Catacombs, adjusting and classifying the memories he discovered there, and illustrating them with the simultaneous study of every manuscript and other document bearing on these topics, which the libraries of Europe and Asia could furnish, and has given to the world a worthy and

enduring monument to his worth, in his *Roma Sotterranea* and his *Bollitino di Archeologia Cristiana*.

It is customary, even at the present day, to have Mass in certain of the larger Catacombs on the feast days of the more distinguished saints whose remains once rested there; and on such occasions a short lecture is delivered by a leading archeologist. It was here, for the first time, I had the pleasure of seeing de Rossi. It was the last day of December, 1891. Mass had just been finished in the Catacombs of Priscilla, on the Salarian Way; the candles which had burned around the rude altar and had helped to dispel the humidity of the air, were extinguished, and had left a cloud of heavy smoke hanging beneath the low ceiling, as it had often hung nearly two score centuries before,—when a man well past middle age, of medium stature, and rather inclined to be fleshy, was seen to rise from his place among the worshippers, and to quietly shoulder his way through the crowd to the corner of the largest chamber, where a stand formed of a bottomless biscuit box with a couple of boards thrown over it, was prepared. Those who knew it was de Rossi bent reverently back to leave him room to pass. He took the stand with the humility of a novice and the undisturbed confidence of a master, and discoursed on the history of the place and the discoveries made therein, since the time when, as a little boy, he had first visited it; meanwhile a number of young and ardent archeologists—Wilpert, Marucchi,

Armellini, and others—who had first lit the slender taper of their knowledge from the strong and steady flame of de Rossi's lamp, turned an attentive ear to the words of their old master, whom they had listened to for years, but whose luminous mind, they knew, might, at any moment, cast a beam of light on some hitherto undiscovered truth. About two years ago de Rossi was stricken with partial paralysis, and Leo XIII. put at his disposal the historic palace of the Popes, Castel Gandolfo, situated on the western slope of the Alban Mountains, a distance of 12 miles from Rome. A fitting place for the veteran student of the Catacombs to end his days. On one side he could look out from his bed of sickness and see the Roman Compagna stretching away to the west and south till it meets the Mediterranean ; on the other, he could look down upon the deep green waters of Lake Albano, from whose opposite bank the furry side of *Monte Cavo* tapers slowly up to its lofty summit, on which the monastery and church of a Christian religious community occupy the site of the temple of *Jupiter Latialis*. Turning a little to the left, he could see the hill on which Tusculum, almost the equal of Rome, once stood ; but instead to pagan temples, he could discern, through the clear Italian atmosphere, a mighty wooden cross, which lifts itself heavenward from the topmost peak, and with inarticulated eloquence preaches a philosophy deeper than Tusculan sages could understand. Still turning to the left, his gaze would fall on

a smoky spot in the middle of the Compagna, where the gray domes of Rome tremble in the caloric glare. His heart would naturally go out to that spot—the scene of his labours, the home of the martyrs. But a thought would sadden his mind: the monuments of Christian Rome are now subject to a vandalism, not, perhaps, so ostensible in its purpose as that conducted by the soldiers of Alaric, yet more deadly in its design, and more scientific in its method. And thus, while the modern occupants of Rome were celebrating the 24th anniversary of the breach of *Porta Pia*, the noble soul of De Rossi, as if unable to suffer the sight of men glorying in a shameful victory over so much that it held most dear, passed to its reward on the 20th of last September.*

Here, then, you have a sketch of the Catacombs as to their topography, origin and history; but only incidental reference has been made to the objects of special interest which they contain. When we take into consideration their antiquity and the number of important memories that have been destroyed within them, and the number that has been carried away and converted to profane uses, we can hardly expect to find much remaining besides the bare walls and floors. However, as they exist to-day, they supply us, notwithstanding the ravishes of time and of vandalic hands, with a large amount of most interest-

*De Rossi died on Sept. 20th, 1894. This lecture was delivered on April 30th, 1895.

ing material for study. Yet, did nothing remain but the bare walls, what true Christian could visit them and not profit thereby? for who could walk through these passages beaten by the footsteps of his brethren of the 3rd, 2nd, and even the 1st century; enter the little chambers where they so often met to adore God; see the other evidences of their piety and devotion; breathe, I had almost said, the very air that once quivered with their song,—and not feel himself moved to higher and nobler aspirations?

The historical inscriptions and epithaps, the writings left by pilgrims on the walls, and the frescoes that adorn the crypts and other small picture galleries, may be said to constitute the chief objects of interest in the Catacombs. The historical inscriptions generally describe the restorations made by the Popes in the parts that had been damaged, the embellishments added by them to those already existing, and the basilicas built by them over the tombs of the saints. They are of much interest, and sometimes throw light on obscure questions of Church history.

The sepulchral inscriptions correspond to the inscriptions on our tombstones, except that they are usually more brief. Many of the older ones contain nothing but the name and age of the deceased. The words *in pace*, in peace, are the oldest adjunct we find to the name. Apart from whatever reference they had to the future state, they signified that the deceased departed this life in peace, that

is, in communion, with the Church. The perilous condition of the Christians in these early days withheld them from using signs or forms of speech that would unnecessarily reveal them to their enemies. And hence we see that when they did begin to give expression to their faith and practices, it was in a deeply symbolical manner. The anchor is, perhaps, the oldest symbol used on the tombs of the Christian Romans. It was the symbol of faith ; but it furthermore served as the symbol of redemption—the cross, partially disguised ; and so true is this, that with the advance of time it gradually loses its form as an anchor, and assumes the perfect form of a cross. Another of the oldest figures that marked the closing slab was the monogram of Christ, formed of the letters *Chi* and *Rho* of the Greek alphabet. With the advance of time, however, a less laconic form of epitaph was introduced, which noted the chief virtues of the deceased, and the sentiments of affection and esteem by which their friends were moved towards them. It is refreshing to turn from the pompous, but gloomy, pagan epitaphs to the simple, affectionate epitaphs of the earnest Christians, which, at every word, breathe of divine hope and consolation. With these, death was not death, but only a sleep. Hence the term *Coemeterium*, which means *dormitorium* that is, a ‘sleeping place,’ a ‘dormitory.’ The chilly *sepultura* of the pagans found no place in the terminology of the early Christians.

In its stead they used the word *depositio*, a deposition, or depositing, which, in its very essence, includes the idea of a future restoration. And death was called *accersio*, a calling, or summoning; so that we find the beautiful epitaph: "*Accersitus ab Angelis*," "called away by angels." These inscriptions are often roughly performed, and show bad spelling and other evidences of having been written in the imperfect Latin of the common people. It is by no means uncommon to find the words "more or less" appended to the age of the deceased, under the abbreviated form "P. M.," *plus vel minus*. As an instance of this custom let us select the epitaph of a Lector, which was discovered on the floor of the old basilica, in the Catacombs of St. Hermes, on the old Salarian way, thus: *Hic requiescit Rufinus Lector Qui vixit Ann. P. M. XXXI. Depositus in pace IIII. Id. Sept. Arcadio et Honorio Augg. V Cons.* That is: "Here rests Rufinus, Lector, who lived 31 years, more or less ('P. M.'): deposited in peace the 10th day of September, Arcadius and Honorius being Consuls." It was a most convenient qualifying phrase, and, I think, might well be adopted by the epitaphists of the nineteenth century, without any danger to their reputation for veracity. By the way, the stone slab was removed from the tomb in 1846, and, notwithstanding the lapse of fourteen centuries and a half, the good Lector's skeleton was entire within.—A short ejaculatory prayer is

not unfrequently added, for instance, "*Paulina Pax Tecu*"(m) "Paulina, peace be with thee!" Another instance of this sort of epitaph belonging to the second century, is taken from the cemetery of Trason on the new Salarian Way, and runs thus: Zonon Benedictus Redidit An-Nobe Berus (here stands the monogram of Christ) Ispirum in Pace. Et Pet. Pro Nobis." "Zonon blessed (child) died at the age of nine years. May the true (Christ) receive his spirit in peace,—and do thou intercede for us." But perhaps the most beautiful epitaph of this class is one belonging to a female named Agapes (who was buried in the Catacombs of Priscilla), which, when literally translated into English prose, runs thus: "Eucharis is my mother, Pius my father; I beseech you, brothers, when you come hither to pray, and invoke in your common prayers the Father and the Son, do not forget dear Agapes, that the all-powerful God may preserve Agapes for ever." It is nothing strange to find the trade, or occupation of the deceased mentioned in the epitaph, for instance: *Sabinus Santias, glazier, sweet soul, aged 40 years and 6 months. Diogenes, fossor, in peace; deposited the 8th day before the Kalends of October.*

A very interesting, or, I had more correctly said, amusing epitaph of this class was discovered in the Catacombs of Domitilla. It is of a woman named Pollecla, and specifies that she used to sell barley in a certain quarter of the city.

The workmanship is passably good, but the spelling is decidedly bad. On the upper portion of the slab the epitaphist informs us whence the deceased had come, in the words, DE BIANOBA (i. e. De Via Nova), *from the New Road*; he then leaves a wide blank in the centre, and near the lower edge of the slab, furnishes her name and occupation, as follows: POLLECLA QVE ORDEV BENDET DE BIANOBA, (i. e. Pollecla Quae hordeum vendebat, de Via Nova), *Pollecla who sold barley on the New Road*. The good Pollecla probably kept a huckster shop on the new road; and little did she think, as she measured out her *Sextarii* and *modii* of barley to her Christian friends and pagan customers, that her name would survive the destruction of all the imperial grandeur she saw around her, and that, after seventeen centuries, her brethren from parts of the world whose existence never entered into the suspicion of the all-conquering Roman, would come to see the spot where her remains had been laid to rest, when only a few weed-covered mounds and some broken pillars would mark the site of Cæsar's Golden House and Rome's world-renowned forum.

It is worthy of note that some Catacombs have groups of names peculiar to themselves—a circumstance that often aids in discovering their origin, and the names of the families to which they originally belonged. It enabled, for instance, the late lamented professor Armellini to discover with, at least, well-founded probability, the family name of

the celebratrd Virgin-Martyr, St. Agnes. From her Acts we knew that she was buried in her family burial place, "*in prædiolo suo*," "*in agello suo*," and in order to discover her family name, it remained to learn to whom the cemetery originally belonged—who were its founders. Careful research in the oldest part of the cemetery—a part containing well preserved sepulchral inscriptions dating back to the days of the first Flavian Emperors—revealed to professor Armellini, that it was first occupied by the family Claudius and the slaves whom they had set free. The cemetery, therefore, belonged to a Christian branch of the noble family of Claudius ; hence, it was reasonably concluded that the forefathers of St. Agnes, who was buried in her family burial place, *in agello suo*, were no other than the family Claudius. Here are three specimens of epitaphs found in the family circle of the Catacombs of St. Agnes :

Clodia Ipses. Lib. Clodi Crecentis,

Clodia Ipses freedwoman of Clodius Crecentis.

L. Clodius Crecen. Clodiæ Victoriæ

Coniugi incomparabili,

L. Clodius Crecentis to Clodia Victoria his incomparable wife.

Clodius Crecentianus.

Again, in the Catacombs of Priscilla, the name *Peter*, though rare elsewhere, forms a group. Nor are we at a loss for an

explanation of this fact, as Priscilla, after whom the Catacombs are named, was mother of Pudens, with whose family ancient traditions so closely unite the history of the Apostle St. Peter.

Nothing in these epitaphs is too small to be taken into account by the critical enquirer. I may give an instance of how valuable an apparently indifferent word may be to the critic. In the Church calendars, on the 10th July, is given the feast of seven brother martyrs, sons of a noble Roman matron named Felicitas, who also died for the faith. According to the Acts which we possess, they suffered under Marcus Aurelius (161-180). Now, however, modern matter-of-fact people may hesitate before accepting the history of Felicitas and her seven sons, yet from a little clause, in an epitaph in the Catacombs of Processus and Martinianus, on the Aurelian Way, we learn, that even in the third century, that same day was dedicated to the memory of distinguished martyrs; for the 11th of July, the day after the interment of the deceased, is called the day after the day of martyrs, *Dies Martyrum*, as if the tenth was, by excellence, the day of martyrs. Here is the text: "To Pecus sweet soul; he was brought to the cemetery the 10th July, was deposited the day after the day of martyrs." (*Pecori Dulcis Anima Benit in Cimitero VIII. Idus Jul. D. P. Postera Die Maturou*). The day on which a Christian died for the faith, and in general, the day on which he was believed to

be admitted into the happiness of heaven, was called the day of his birth. And unless we keep this fact before our minds, we shall be strongly tempted to accuse the good Christians of seventeen centuries ago, of foolish errors; for instance, of a seven-year-old child, who died the day after his Baptism, it is said that he received the grace of Baptism the day before his birth.

The epitaphs in verse are generally beautiful and instructive. Many of the larger ones are the work of Pope Damasus. and were placed on the tombs, not at the *deposition* of those for whom they were composed, but later on, when Damasus undertook the work of restoration. I have not time to enter at length upon them. And yet I can hardly pass them over without taking notice of some. An interesting inscription from his pen was placed in the Catacombs of St. Sebastian, in commemoration of an event which is said to have taken place while the bodies of SS. Peter and Paul were temporarily guarded there, not long after their martyrdom. Though it can scarcely be placed in the category of historical facts, still it is held by a number of distinguished historians, that at this time certain persons came from the East to claim and carry away the bodies of SS. Peter and Paul, as those of their own countrymen; but being intercepted by the Roman people, they hid them in a part of these Catacombs. Now, Damasus speaks of this as of an acknowledged fact, and seems to rejoice that Rome retained her precious

trust. He writes :—

“Here first dwelt saints, whose names, if you would ask them, are Peter and Paul. The East sent these disciples (of Christ)—that we freely admit. By the merit of their bloody death having followed Christ through the stars, they sought the heavenly abodes and the kingdom of the holy But Rome rather merited to defend them as her own citizens.”

A very beautiful metrical epitaph has been brought to light in the Catacombs commonly called *Ad Septem Columbas*, on the old Salarian Way. It belongs to a certain Consul named Liberalis—of whom ecclesiastical records and profane history are alike silent,—who, as the epitaph says, acquired the honor of Consul through the favour of his Prince, but now enjoys the eternal honour of martyr through his disfavour. Here is the text :—

Martyris hic sancti Liberalis membra quiescunt.

Qui quondam in terris Consul honore fuit ;

Sed crevit titulis factus de consule martyr,

Cui vivit semper morte creatus honor ;

Plus fuit irato quam grato principe felix,

Quem perimens rabidus misit ad astra furor.

Gratia cui trabeas dederat, dedit ira coronam,

Dum Christo procerum mens inimica fuit.

Obtulit haec Domino componens atria Florus

Ut Sanctos venerans praemia justa ferat.

For the benefit of those who are not acquainted with the Latin language, I would venture the following free

translation :—

Here holy Liberalis' limbs repose,
Whom earth in knightly honours once arrayed ;
Now higher titles, born of death, he knows,
From Consul vain a glorious martyr made ;
Whom Prince's rage, more favouring than his smile,
With rabid fury sent unto the skies,
And gave immortal crown, where love erstwhile
Had given a purple mantle—woe's disguise.
These things hath Florus, caring for these halls,
In humble tribute offered to the Lord,
That venerating here these sainted souls
He yet may glory in a just reward.

Two other metrical inscriptions, not however the work of Damasus, may be desiring of a passing notice, on account of their strong resemblance to each other. They both belong to the cemetery of St. Lawrence on the Tiburtine Way. One is of a bishop 80 years of age ; the other is of that archdeacon whom we have already heard lecturing those of the faithful who had made imprudent efforts to secure burial near the tombs of the saints. The venerable old bishop, after having informed us that he was at one time a rich unbeliever, but became converted and followed Christ, distributing his goods to the poor, adverts with evident pleasure, to the fact that he used to sing sacred music with the people. The archdeacon mentions the same circumstance in his own life, saying that he had “modulated the psalms with voice and art, and had sung the sacred

words with divers sounds : " which, I suppose, implied that he had a rich voice.

It was customary to occasionally interrupt the chanting of the psalms with a short *solo*, with a view to exciting greater devotion in the minds of the people. But *solos* are accompanied by strong temptations to vanity, and even here they degenerated into soft, theatrical singing, until St. Gregory abolished the custom, and instituted the Gregorian, or plain chant, as being, in his judgment, more suitable to the nature and purpose of sacred music.

The wonderful speed with which Christianity permeated every grade of Roman Society, from the humblest slave up to the highest dignitaries, is clearly shown from the epitaphs of distinguished personages which have been brought to light throughout the Catacombs of Rome. The Emperor Valerian, when, in 257, he published his edict against the Christians, made express mention of Roman Senators and Knights, *Senatores et Equites Romani*; Tertullian in the second century, writing to Scapula, Proconsul of Africa, reminds him that the Emperor well knew that among the Christians there were men and women of Senatorial rank, *clarissimi viri et clarissimae feminae*; and when the Proconsul threatened persecution in Carthage, Tertullian asked, " And what will you do with so many thousands of every sex, of every age and of every dignity?" Pliny (*Epist. X. ad Troj.*) bears similar testimony. One of

the most noteworthy discoveries throwing further light on this fact, was made in the Catacombs of Priscilla in the year 1889. Various pagan writers mention Acilius Galbrion, Consul for the year 91, as having fallen into disfavour with the Emperor Domitian. Sentonius says he suffered for being a "*molitor rerum novarum*," an introducer of new ideas. The term seems to correspond to the epithet, *nova superstitio*, which the pagans not unfrequently applied to the Christian religion. At any rate Christian historians generally agree that the Consul Acilius Galbrion died for the faith. But at length the Catacombs yielded up the treasured testimony which, for nearly nineteen centuries, they had kept wrapt in their silent bosom. In the years 1388-89, excavations in the Catacombs of Priscilla laid bare the burial-place of a Christian Roman family of senatorial rank, bearing the name of Galbrion.

As a concluding remark on the epitaphs, I may say that among the thousands of sepulchral inscriptions scattered throughout the Christian cemeteries of the first four centuries, not one instance is known where the name of *slave* appears, and very rarely the name of *freedman*. Christianity found slavery a part of the political life, and could not abolish its actual existence by a stroke of the pen. But this absence of even the faintest reference to distinction of class, shows how firmly the Church held and practised that doctrine which Lactantius drew from her bosom, when he

wrote : “Amongst us there is no distinction between servant and master, nor is there any reason why we give ourselves the name of ‘*brothers*,’ except that we believe we are all equal” The Church undoubtedly recognized the social distinctions of subject and ruler, servant and master, but she did not recognize them as arising from inferiority and superiority of nature. Whatever might be the respective values placed by the world on the souls of men, within the sacred precincts of the Christian Church, all joined in worship with equal humility, and equal hope, for they served a common Father, and strove after a common inheritance, being all united in a true Christian brotherhood, “Where there is neither Gentile nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian nor Scythian, bond nor free. But Christ is all, and in all.” (Col. iii., 11.)

The inscriptions left from the earliest Christian times on the walls and around the tombs of saints by pilgrims and other visitors form another instructive group of monuments. The faithful sought those places where the memories of saints and martyred heroes were fresh ; and when they found themselves within such holy grounds, and surrounded by such ennobling influences, their hearts burnt with enthusiasm and holy desire, and they gave vent to their feelings in words written upon, or carved into, the walls. They are many and various, but usually take the form of short aspirations, or ejaculatory prayers. They are fre-

nently addressed to the saints on whose tombs they are written, in the popular form of expression, familiar to the students of the Catacombs, *Abete in mente* 'remember me,' or 'keep me in your mind.' In the cemetery of Praettestatus, on the wall just in front of the tombs of two celebrated deacons, Felecissimus and Agapito, are written the word, "*Succurrite (mihi, martyres) ut vincam in die judicii,*" assist (me, O martyrs) that I may conquer in the day of judgment." One pilgrim was so struck with the sanctuary of St. Sixtus II., in the Catacombs of Callixtus, as to compare it to the Jerusalem of the saints. He writes, "*Gerusalem civitas et ornamentum Martirum Domini Cujus*" . . . "Jerusalem the city and ornament of martyrs of the Lord whose,"—here the sentence ends unfinished. Perhaps the poor pilgrim was pressed onward by the throng, or perhaps he became "becalmed in a sea of thought."

But one of the most touching of those little records of pilgrims' visits, is that of a person who came to the Catacombs of Callixtus while sorrow for a departed friend, or relation, was fresh in his soul. The holy memories that encompassed him impressed and strengthened him, till Christian hope beamed triumphantly through the gloom of his sorrow. When he entered the outer chamber where Pope Sixtus II. had been executed, the thought of the dear departed—his mother, perhaps, or sister, or wife, or bethrothed, it matters not, but her name

was Sofronia --arose in his mind, and he wrote on the wall, "Sofronia mayest thou live with thine." (*Sofronia vibas cum tuis.*) He enters a little farther, and the thought comes back to him, and again he writes, "Sofronia mayest thou live in the Lord." (*Sofronia in Domino.*) But he has not yet done: on the end wall of an inner chamber he again gives vent to the pressing thought, and writes in large letters, "Sofronia ever dear, thou shalt live in God." (*Sofronia dulcis semper lives in Domino*); and immediately under, he writes a fourth time, "Sofronia thou shalt live!" (*Sofronia lives.*)

The pictures that adorn the walls of the Catacombs are many and precious. They are in great part illustrative of scriptural texts, and are deeply symbolical. There are also the images of saints therein interred, as well as engravings symbolizing various articles of Christian doctrine. A scene very often met with is that of Jonas and the "great fish." This was the common symbol of the resurrection. You see Jonas being thrown into the sea, with the fish ready to catch him. In some instances the fish is very different in appearance from any we know. The neck is long, and the head bears a striking resemblance to a horse's, while the body reminds us of the cuts which scientists furnish of an extinct species to which they have given the big Greek name *Ichthyosaurus* (fish-reptile). In the same scene you sometimes see Jonas cast upon the

shore by the fish, and finally reposing in his booth outside the walls of Nineveh. Birds disporting among flowers are also common. In fact, birds are often found, in rough engravings, on the sepulchral slabs. They signified the soul of the deceased, and, represented amongst flowers, signified the soul admitted into the heavenly garden, Paradise. Another symbol of the soul is a woman in the attitude of one praying. Over an arched tomb, in the Catacombs of Ciriaca, on the Tiburtine Way, the soul is represented as a woman between two saints, who are in the act of lifting up veils, according to the idea caught from St. Paul, Heb. VI., 19, to introduce it into the inner tabernacle of Christ. Then there is the Good Shepherd carrying home the lost sheep. Few pictures meet the eye of the visitor as often as this. Closely allied to it is the scene of the man sick of the palsy, as, in obedience to the healing command of Christ, he arises, takes up his bed, and goes into his house. (St. Mark II., 11). It would seem that the faithful took this means of signifying their belief in consoling doctrine that Christ is ever ready to receive the repentant sinner; as also of protesting against the Novatian errors concerning the forgiveness of sins. Those who have read that inimitable story entitled, "*Fabiola*; or, the Church of the Catacombs," will remember how charmingly the author describes the effect produced by the pictures of the Good Shepherd, on the heart of the apostate Christian, *Torquatus*,

who had betrayed his brethern, and acted as guide to a detachment of pagan soldiers in the Catacombs of Callixtus.

Some of the other more favourite objects of Christian art in the Catacombs are : The three children in the fiery furnace, Daniel among the lions, the shepherd among his sheep, Moses striking the rock from which a stream of water flows, Lazarus rising from the tomb at the call of Christ, and various others. The happiness of heaven was symbolized in a banquet scene. For instance, in the Catacombs of SS. Peter and Marcelline, on the Labican Way, persons are seated at a small table on which the *Ichthus*, or mystic fish, is prepared, and are served by two women. The respective names of the women are written over their heads. One is called *Irene* (i. e. peace), the other is called *Agape* (i. e. love) ; for love and peace are our attendants at the heavenly banquet.

It is needless to say that the image of Our Divine Saviour was the one with which Christian art delighted most to adorn the walls of the Catacombs. After him, the most favourite subject for the brush of the artist was his Blessed Mother. She is represented in various circumstances. Sometimes in midst of the apostles, and not rarely between SS. Peter and Paul; sometimes seated with the Divine Infant in her arms, but most frequently in the scene of the adoration of the Magi. The most celebrated image of her—celebrated by reason of its antiquity, was discovered

in a small crypt of the Catacombs of Priscilla, and belongs to the 2nd century. She is seated with the Divine Infant in her bosom; over his head is a star, and right in front of her and facing towards her, is a man, who is understood to be a prophet, with an open volume in his hand. Perhaps no *fresco* appears so strange, to those who are not acquainted with the symbolism of the Catacombs, as that of a horse running a race, and, at the same time, stretching out to catch in his mouth a piece of bread marked with the sign of the cross.

I have no doubt, the natural desire to know will here be excited in many of you who would wish to ask, 'What, then, does it mean?' Well, all may not agree in interpreting it and, as I said at the outset, the plan of this lecture keeps me aloof from interpretations. I shall therefore merely inform you how archeologists commonly understand it. They say: by the horse we are to understand the Christian in the course of this mortal life. The thought, they add, is taken from St Paul, who, in his 2nd epistle to Timothy (iv. 7), says he has finished his course; and in his 1st to the Corinthians (ix., 24), writes: "Know you not that they that run in the race, all run indeed, but one receiveth the prize?" And the bread marked with the sign of the cross, they tell us, signifies the Eucharistic bread which supports the spiritual life of the Christian in his weary race.

Nowhere in the Catacombs do we find, within the same

space, so large a collection of interesting pictures as in five small crypts in the Catacombs of Callixtus, known as the crypts of the Sacraments. The nature of the pictures suggested the name. Many of the scenes are reproduced in each of the five chambers. The most common amongst them is the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes. Persons sit at a table on which is prepared one large fish. Near by are baskets of bread. In one instance the bread and fish are together on a small three-legged table; a man wearing a *pallium* stands beside it, with his right hand extended over the fish, while a woman, in the attitude of one praying, is not far off. We know that the early Christians used the fish as a symbol of Christ, the letters of the Greek word for fish, *ichthus*, being the initial letters of the name of Christ. Another common picture of this group is Moses striking the rock. But the scenes taken from the New Testament which surround him, lead one to suspect that he is only a symbolical personage; and one is strengthened, if not confirmed, in this suspicion, on seeing the name of Peter written over his head. In one of these five crypts of which I am at present speaking, this Moses-Peter, if I may so call him, is striking the rock, from which a stream of water flows; a short distance below a fisherman is sitting on the bank in the act of taking a small fish with a hook; then comes the usual banquet scene; next is a child standing in the stream, while a man wearing a

pallium pours water on his head; not far off is the favourite scene of the infirm man of the gospel taking up his bed and walking. I shall not stop to give any detailed interpretation of these scenes. What the mystic rock is we learn from St. Paul (1 Cor. x., 4) where, speaking of the Israelites in the desert, he says, "They drank of the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ." The leader of Christ's people, therefore, strikes the mystic rock by the exercise of his office, and the waters of grace flow out to the faithful, and are applied to their souls through the Sacraments.

I have now completed the plan which I laid down from the beginning. But, as you see, my lecture has been a general introduction to the study of the Catacombs, rather than a critical study of each or any one in particular. I have said nothing of the Vatican cemetery, the first official cemetery of the bishops of Rome, over which the church of St. Peter's now stands; I have said nothing of the Ostrian cemetery, with which the life and labours of St. Peter in Rome are so closely connected; I have said nothing of a very large number of other cemeteries; and when I did make reference to any one in particular, it was only by way of illustration of the general facts to which I have necessarily limited my discourse.

How many precious memories still lie hidden in Rome's ancient Christian cemeteries we cannot say;—future excavations shall tell. Their present condition is not promising.

Quite a number of them are commanded by private owners who, in some instances, will not permit the archeologists to carry on the work of excavation and research. Besides, the ruling genius of modern politics seems resolved not to be wooed by the memory of early Christian life and customs. And undoubtedly the powers that be in Italian politics give us poor hopes of a future period of rehabilitated good feeling. "Tear down the old, build up the new" is the watchword. They seem to think that nothing that does not scent of the mortar and varnish of the 19th century is worthy of our enlightened age. With thy cry of "progress" and "intellectual emancipation" on their lips, they trample on every manner of science that tends most to ennoble the mind and purify the heart, then look about for loud applause, which some are blind enough to give, while they wage war against the treasures with which Christian art, Christian learning and Christian piety have been adorning Rome for nineteen centuries, and have long since rendered it the attraction of the civilized world. A fresh discovery in the Catacombs will not help to build a powder magazine; where then the profit? The records of early Christian virtues and heroism will not equip another soldier from the field; where then the attraction? The holy shrine before which pious Christians have for ages whispered their prayers, and found consolation in their afflictions, and where the joyful hymns of pure-hearted worshippers fell, like a sweet dew from heaven, on the

hardened heart of the sinner and prepared it for repentance, is worthless to a race of mortals superior to the weakness of religion. Let the blasphemies and obscene songs of the soldiery, therefore, replace the prayers of the penitent sinner and the hymns of the consecrated Virgin, to show to the world that men have arisen from their bondage and are marching triumphantly on the highroad of progress! But all noble minds will feel and understand that modern institutions, however admirable they may be, are not the only things in the world deserving of our respect; and they will furthermore agree, that the world is wide enough for their development, without violating those sacred reserves around which the history of faith, hope, and love has raised a wall too holy for man to profane. They bear up to us the thoughts and records of a venerable past, and, at the same time, carry us back to the companionship of brethren who know nothing, it is true, of steam engines and electric lights, but who were familiar with the mechanism of a nobler art—the art of living well, and who walked in the light of a brighter lamp—the lamp of faith, which illumined a more arduous, though more noble way than modern scoffers have courage to tread. Whoever loves and reverences the lives of those far-back Christians, will certainly respect the monuments that have survived the ravishes of time to tell their history, amongst which few can hold an equal place with the Catacombs of Rome.

